

DOING MORE WITH LESS:

**THE 2006 - 2016 LONG RANGE PLAN
OF THE
UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT FOR
THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**



September 2006

**Honorable Barry Russell, Chief Judge
Jon D. Ceretto, Executive Officer/Clerk of Court**

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

The United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California (the “Court”) made public its first Long Range Plan in April of 1994 (www.cacb.uscourts.gov) (the “First Plan”). The First Plan was created by a group of 21 individuals including judges and senior managers of the Clerk’s staff. Leadership assistance was provided by the Administrative Office of the United States Courts and drafts of the First Plan were reviewed and commented upon by the bar, members of the federal judiciary and other parties interested in the progress of the Court.

The importance of the First Plan became apparent immediately. For the first time the Court had a comprehensive document that set forth the perceived needs and aspirations of the Court in areas ranging from ethics to space and facilities management to community relations. The Court soon learned that one of the most important aspects of successful planning is recognizing the need to change plans when appropriate. The First Plan was amended in March of 1998 (the “First Amended Plan”) (use website address and link as above) and again in 2001 (the “Second Amended Plan”) (use same website address and link as above). The Court has successfully addressed most of the issues and objectives identified over the past ten years in the First Plan, the First Amended Plan, and the Second Amended Plan.

Inevitably things change. Severe budgetary concerns for the federal government in general, and the Court in particular, have resulted in dramatic reduction in funding. Simultaneously, historically low interest rates have manifested in a significant reduction in bankruptcy case filings in the Court. In the year 2000, total case filings for the court numbered 80,784. In 2004 this number dropped to 60,641. However, filings for the comparable period of time in 2005 totaled 84,245.

Severe budget restraints and a significant drop in case filings, as well as other factors, resulted in the need for the Court to reduce its staff from about 420 in the year 2000 to about 286 in the year 2004. By the end of 2005, the number of staff had further reduced to 253. Such an unprecedented reduction in the Clerk’s staff could reasonably be expected to result in a crippling loss of efficiency for the Court. This disastrous result was avoided by the farsightedness, ingenuity and hard work of the Clerk and his management team.

The Court, facing this new set of challenges, has decided that it needs a new long range plan. The document that follows draws upon its predecessors in many respects. In this new Plan, the Court confirms its commitment to many aspirational values expressed in the First Plan in the Leadership and Ethics and Standards of Conduct sections. These values are so important that, in one sense, they form the foundation of the planning process and the Court itself, and therefore are not addressed anew. Instead, the Court will focus on its specific strategic needs in the areas of Case Management, Community Outreach, Facilities and Security, Human Resources and Information Management. This restructuring reflects an emphasis on streamlining the planning process in accord with the streamlining of the operations of the Court which have taken and will continue to take

place. The same emphasis is found in the Court's new mission statement which is set forth in Section III.

The Long Range Planning Committee

David Naugle, Chair

Sheri Bluebond, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge

Robin Riblet, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge

John Ryan, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge

Maureen Tighe, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge

Vincent Zurzolo, U.S. Bankruptcy Judge

SECTION II

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The United States Bankruptcy Court for the Central District of California prepared a third revised Long Range Plan ("LRP," issued September 2001) to outline and project the goals of the Court for about ten years. The original LRP had been published in April 1994, with an intermediate substantial revision in March 1998. Many of the objectives set forth in the earlier editions of the LRP have been attained, and the Court can proudly point to substantial numbers of accomplishments that seemed like distant hopes when first listed. Technology and budget support have been major positive factors in these triumphs. However, the earlier attempts to project our goals were basically internally generated and thus lacked an important aspect of long range planning; to wit, broadening the horizons of the organization by making the process open to the new perspectives and guidance of our user constituencies. This LRP was prepared with the assistance of attorneys acting through bar associations and the bankruptcy forums, the United States Trustee, panel trustees and their staffs, and the Clerk's Office, from top to bottom. We have profited from their input.

The Committee judges updated the September 2001 edition by deleting goals already accomplished and by streamlining the format of the draft LRP. Once the judges had reviewed and tentatively approved the structure and content of the document, it was circulated to the Clerk's Office executive managers and to the Clerk's Office staff as a whole, where it formed the basis of an open forum discussion at the Fall 2005 district-wide training seminar in Universal City. It was also circulated to the U.S. Trustee, and to the various legal associations for review and comment.

The Committee was then expanded to include representatives of each of these constituencies; the turnout and direct participation personally and by videoconferencing at our various divisions was impressive. The lawyers and trustees found an arena to communicate with the U.S. Trustee and with the Court concerning various areas that need attention and ultimately improvement. The Clerk's Office appreciated their inclusion in the planning process, and all of these groups made valuable suggestions for improvement of the system, even when some of the comments were too short-term or specific for the LRP itself. Finally, the Committee as a whole vetted the individual recommendations received from the Clerk's Office, the U.S. Trustee, and the lawyer and trustee representatives, some of which had been provided to the expanded Committee members by the various associations. The Committee voted on dozens of specific items, and came up with a draft LRP for consideration by the Board of Judges. The process was a success, and we believe that the LRP is worthwhile, in part because it represents the collective efforts of all of these groups. The Board of Judges approved this LRP at its meeting on September 8, 2006.

SECTION III

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT FOR THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

To provide efficiently justice to all parties affected by bankruptcy in the most populous and diverse district in the country.

SECTION IV

THE PLAN

PREFACE

The Plan is divided into five strategic areas listed in alphabetical order: Case Management, Community Outreach, Facilities and Security, Human Resources and Information Management. Following these categories of strategic issues and objectives are aspirational goals in the areas of Leadership and Ethics. These goals are unchanging and form the foundation of the Court's vision and operations.

SECTION V

STRATEGIC ISSUES AND OBJECTIVES

CASE MANAGEMENT

- Objective #1. Expand site-based pro bono assistance program.
- Objective #2. Encourage increased use of telephonic and video appearances where appropriate.
- Objective #3. Encourage judges to serve in a different division at least once a year.
- Objective #4. Facilitate the judges' ability to prepare more orders.
- Objective #5. Reduce Clerk's Office labor component for all case processing and case management functions.
- Objective #6. Standardize docket entries.
- Objective #7. Explore the ability to process documents while working at an alternate work location. (*See also* Human Resources Objective #1.)
- Objective #8. Facilitate, as appropriate, the administration of small cases.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- Objective #1. Expand relations with minority bar associations.
- Objective #2. Obtain funding for foreign language interpretation and translation services.
- Objective #3. Encourage effective cross-cultural communication in the courtroom.
- Objective #4. Create bankruptcy education programs.
- Objective #5. Create pamphlets in Spanish available for the public on the nature of chapters 7, 11, and 13.
- Objective #6. Review all information available to the public and revise it to accord with changes in the law.
- Objective #7. Provide public education on issues such as separation of powers, judicial independence, rule of law, and stare decisis.
- Objective #8. Update the web site periodically to keep it current and user-friendly.
- Objective #9. Encourage legal assistance from pro bono attorneys for parties who cannot afford an attorney. (*See also* Facilities and Security Objective #7.)
- Objective #10. Make electronic filing more accessible to the public.
- Objective #11. Publicize appropriate means to communicate suggestions for Court rules and procedures.

FACILITIES AND SECURITY

- Objective #1. Review divisional organization of the Court.
- Objective #2. Create a plan for court operation in the event of a natural disaster or other catastrophe that affects all or substantially all of the district.
- Objective #3. Determine the amount of space used by the Court that is necessary to serve the public.
- Objective #4. Establish a “virtual” courtroom system.
- Objective #5. Establish or create technology to enable litigants to appear from where ever they are.
- Objective #6. Validate efficacy of Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) on a continuing basis.
- Objective #7. Explore providing space in the courthouses for providing pro bono legal assistance. (*See also* Community Outreach Objective #9.)
- Objective #8. Make electronic locks and access to doors, elevators, and locations more universal, and limit physical keys and cipher locks.

HUMAN RESOURCES

- Objective #1. Evaluate and modify, if necessary, the use of the telework program. (*See also* Case Management Objective #7.)
- Objective #2. Ensure a smooth transition as senior staff members retire.
- Objective #3. Recruit and retain a workforce consistent with the Court's technology.
- Objective #4. Enhance training for all staff.
- Objective #5. Develop a new employee recognition program consistent with national guidelines.
- Objective #6. Establish a mechanism for line staff to provide feedback to management staff.
- Objective #7. Explore alternative work schedules for staff.
- Objective #8. Implement digital time card and leave tracking/management systems.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

- Objective #1. Expand CM/ECF¹ to all constituents.
- Objective #2. Reduce paper/printer costs.
- Objective #3. Enable pro se e-filing safely and in accordance with applicable laws.
- Objective #4. Educate other bankruptcy courts regarding the benefits and advantages of CIAO! and other software developed by the Court.
- Objective #5. Provide computer terminals in Clerk's offices for pro se litigants to use for filing court documents electronically.
- Objective #6. Enable e-filing of proofs of claim by high volume claim filers such as the Internal Revenue Service.
- Objective #7. Modify CIAO! so tentative rulings are easily included in the docket as findings of fact and conclusions of law in support of court rulings.
- Objective #8. (See Human Resources Objective #8.)

¹*Case Management/Electronic Case Files*

SECTION VI

ASPIRATIONAL GOALS

LEADERSHIP

- Goal #1. Enhance leadership skills throughout the Court.
- Goal #2. Increase effectiveness of the Court's communication and working relationships with other federal courts, agencies, and Congress.
- Goal #3. Improve communication and relations with state courts and legislative branches.
- Goal #4. Initiate and formalize cooperative efforts with professional organizations and groups.

ETHICS AND STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

- Goal #1. Provide an impartial Court environment to all users.
- Goal #2. Foster a workplace free of bias.
- Goal #3. Foster a courtroom environment free of bias.
- Goal #4. Foster civility within the courtroom environment.
- Goal #5. Promote professional courtesy among attorneys.